

Lithuanians Ordered To Surrender Arms

Gorbachev Asserts Power of New Office

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 21—Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev issued an executive order today directing Lithuanian citizens to surrender all weapons "for temporary storage" and instructing local authorities to tighten border checks and restrictions on foreign visitors in the Baltic republic.

Although the Kremlin has given repeated public assurances that it has no intention of using force to make the Lithuanians abandon their declaration of independence from the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's order, his first since assuming the powerful new office of president last week, significantly increases the political pressure on the break-away republic.

The order accused the Lithuanian legislature of continuing to "pass bills that violate the rights of Soviet citizens and the sovereignty of the Soviet Union" and calls on Soviet security forces to "ensure observance of the constitution and defend the rights and lawful interests" of all residents of Lithuania, an apparent reference to the sizable numbers of ethnic Russians and other nationalities living in the republic.

The decree also gave Soviet Interior Ministry officials the authority to confiscate weapons from any residents of Lithuania who do not turn them in voluntarily.

Lithuanian leaders, headed by President Vytautas Landsbergis, denounced Gorbachev's use of his new presidential powers. "This order," Landsbergis said in a statement late tonight, "like any other adopted by a foreign state that pretends to claim sovereignty over Lithuania, has no legal power. It could be carried out only by brutal military force . . . [and] amounts to the claiming of nonexistent and unjustified sovereignty of a powerful country over a small and unarmed neighbor."

[At the White House, press secretary Marlin Fitzwater said the Bush administration was concerned about the latest Gorbachev move, and he noted a statement by Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze on Tuesday that the issues would be resolved peacefully. "It's a matter we are watching seriously," Fitzwater said. "We view these re-

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ports with concern and continue to urge dialogue between both sides."

[Another senior official said that the administration is uneasy about what he called "the contradictory signals" from Moscow and continues to view this as an effort to intimidate the Lithuanians.]

Late Tuesday night, Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene sent Gorbachev a telegram protesting what she said were unusual tank and warplane maneuvers in the republic. "The people of Lithuania are deeply disturbed about the actions of the Soviet armed forces—the intense mobilization of armored vehicles and tanks, the intensified flights of air force planes and unauthorized sorties into Lithuanian territory by paratroopers involved in intelligence activities," Prunskiene wrote.

Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov and other Kremlin officials have said there has been no military build-up in the Baltic and that any maneuvers in the region were routine. Even among the Lithuanian leadership there is uncertainty and disagreement about the question of maneuvers, and all say they envision no direct military intervention from Moscow.

Sources in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, said there has been no sign of large-scale troop movements in the region, and Lithuanian officials said that a more realistic Kremlin strategy would include continued political pressure and, possibly, a limited economic blockade. Prunskiene, an economist, said, however, that the republic was still receiving regular shipments of oil and gas for the neighboring Soviet Russian republic, its most crucial import.

have deserted from the Soviet army or avoided the draft.

On Tuesday, Gorbachev ordered increased security at the Ignalina nuclear power plant and other strategic installations in Lithuania, and the Kremlin declared void the repub-

lic's attempt to claim state property on its soil. Landsbergis responded to those pronouncements from Moscow by describing them as merely the start of a long negotiating process that will ultimately affirm Lithuania's assertion of independence.

Meanwhile, in the Soviet standing legislature, or Supreme Soviet, members of the chamber known as the Council of the Union approved overwhelmingly on first reading a new bill on secession that would allow any of the Soviet Union's 15 constituent republics to leave the union—but only after approval by local referendum and a waiting period of five years.

Lithuanian legislators, who have retained their seats in the body for now, greeted the action with disinterest. "This law does not affect us; we have already left," said one, Vaidotas Antanaitis. During debate on the bill, Antanaitis pointed out that Soviet state founder Lenin had said that secession from the Soviet Union should be unconditional.

Gorbachev's order today stems from his enhanced powers as executive president. In arguing earlier this year for creation of the new office, Gorbachev and his Kremlin allies said that he had been unable to cope effectively with a number of inter-ethnic issues because of a "vacuum of power." Members of Soyuz, a conservative faction in the Supreme Soviet, had appealed to Gorbachev to extend direct presidential rule over Lithuania until the end of the crisis. They also criticized the position assumed by the Lithuanian legislators, including Antanaitis, who now describe themselves as observers in the Supreme Soviet, rather than direct participants.

As part of his executive decree, Gorbachev ordered Soviet authorities to monitor more closely the activities of foreigners in Lithuania and KGB security troops to adopt "necessary measures to strengthen the guard on regions of the Soviet state border and to halt all unlawful acts."

Kremlin officials are reportedly angry that the Lithuanian independence movement Sajudis has begun registering young men to be stationed as customs and border officials along the republic's frontier. Most of the recruits are said to